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City man sues, says CIA violated rights

The federal government was sued for \$20,000 Thursday by a Minneapolis man who charged that the CIA violated his civil rights by opening, without a warrant, a letter sent to him by his son.

The complaint charged that B. Leonard Avery and his son Michael were just two of the victims of a "massive, covert, illegal and wrongful" program under which the federal government opened, read and photographed thousands of sealed first-class letters.

It called the letter-opening program "illegal, wrongful and unconstitutional" and said letters were opened from 1953 to 1973.

The suit was filed on Avery's behalf by the American Civil Liberties Union and the Minnesota Civil Liberties Union (MCLU).

Randall Tighe, Avery's counsel and former MCLU staff legal counsel, said the letter was opened and photographed in 1968. He said his client learned of the action in 1975, when the CIA responded to a request he made under the Freedom of Information Act for a copy of his CIA file.

Tighe said his client had filed administrative claims last year for damages against four agencies. He said the suit was filed because those claims were rejected by the CIA and the Justice Department, and no final decision was received from the U.S. Postal Service or the FBI.

Tighe said both Averys are listed as victims of the letter-opening program in a class-action suit now pending in U.S. District Court in Rhode Island.